



Bureau of Land Management – Critical Incident Stress Management Program

## What to Expect after a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

It is possible to feel ok following a critical incident, participate in a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD), and come out of the debriefing feeling a bit unsettled. This is not overly concerning unless the feeling is uncomfortably intense. The unsettled feeling that can be generated by a CISD is often related to the mild-to-moderate anxiety caused by psychologically revisiting the incident. This feeling usually diminishes within a few hours or days following the debriefing.

### Following a critical incident stress debriefing you may:

- Feel unsettled; not quite —yourself.¶
- Replay the incident over and over in your mind.
- Wonder why you did or did not do certain things.
- Wonder why others did or did not do certain things.
- Wonder why you are having particular feelings.
- Not sleep normally.
- Have dreams, even nightmares, about the incident.
- Have dreams that include incident-specific themes.
- Experience appetite changes – overeating or no appetite.
- Find yourself drinking more alcoholic beverages.
- Feel less safe than prior to the incident.
- Think more about those closest to you.
- Have feelings that seem unusual or out of character for you.
- Think more about life and death, or the meaning of life.
- Worry more about your job, your welfare, and the welfare of your family.
- Feel a bit numb, edgy, irritable, angry, anxious, or —down.¶
- Feel physically uncomfortable – headache, fatigue, stomach upset, etc.

Most importantly, you may not experience any of the above. It is not abnormal to feel ok following a critical incident or CISD. Many of the responses that can follow a critical incident will diminish within a month. Significant improvement is often experienced within two weeks. Rarely, thoughts of suicide or of harming others are present following a critical incident. If you have suicidal thoughts or thoughts about harming others, you should tell someone and seek professional assistance immediately.

### Take care of yourself. For the next several weeks:

- Watch how you talk to yourself
- Be patient with yourself and others,
- Engage in mild exercise,
- Practice self-care by doing things that are calming and rewarding,
- Stay connected to those that you care about and who care about you,
- Some alone time is ok but do not isolate yourself,
- Avoid alcohol as a means of coping,
- Engage your support resources.
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\* note that many of the possible debriefing responses are identical to the possible responses following the incident itself.